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Advertising consumer goods in nineteenth-century Britain: reinterpretations[1]

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By comparison with the growing literature which deals with the history of American advertising, the history of advertising in Britain remains largely unresearched.[2] Most North American literature has concentrated on the period since 1880, and in particular since the second World War. It is true that some of the issues raised by competing interpretations of advertising in the American economy and society during the twentieth century may not be directly applicable to the British context nineteenth century. None the less, a brief preliminary survey identifies the principal parameters of the debates, both theoretical and empirical, which the North American literature has stimulated should provide a useful starting point from which to begin to fill the serious historical gap which Benson highlighted in his recent monograph surveying the rise of consumer society in Britain.[3] By providing a wider perspective, that literature is relevant to any attempt to reinterpret advertising in Britain, particularly because much of the previous literature approached it from the standpoint of culture, literature, or societal concerns, tending to ignore Fine and Leopold's timely reminder that 'advertising is itself concerned with the creation of a product . . . and sold to make a profit'.[4]

I

The works of recent historians of advertising in America (Baird, Fox, Marchand, Pope, Strasser, and Tedlow), which figure in the review of

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[2] In addition to the contributions made by Nevett, McKendrick, Richards, and Loeb which are referred to below, see Elliott, *History of English advertising*, and Turner, *Shocking history of advertising*, both of which are popular narrative accounts, dwelling on the anecdotal. Hindley and Hindley, *Advertising in Victorian England* focuses on the history of advertising agents and their functions. Though nearly one half of the book is devoted to illustrations, a substantial part of the remainder deals with promotional literature, the arts of the copywriter, stunts, and showmen. For the post-1945 period, see Offer, 'Mask of intimacy'.

[3] Benson, *Rise of consumer society*.

[4] Fine and Leopold, *World of consumption*, p. 215.

the literature below have all emphasized the formative role which advertising played in creating and shaping the 'consumer society', however defined, between the 1880s and the 1980s.[5] In their accounts, manufacturing entrepreneurs superseded traditional producers and retailers selling unbranded goods in local and regional markets. By exploiting technical innovations in transport, communications, manufacturing, and processing, and through national advertising and branding, they constructed mass markets for mass-produced products. The mass market was the outcome, not of the invisible hand working through the interaction of supply and demand, but of corporate decision-makers who, as Baird's recent study sought to demonstrate,[6] organized their enterprises through a process of vertical integration in order to create it. Significantly, in these expositions, consumers are relegated to fulfilling a minor supporting role. In Tedlow's view, their 'unorganised inchoate demand' assumed shape only when the mass marketers set about the task of moulding the market. Tedlow sums up the historical relationship between advertisers and consumers by concluding: 'the customer disposes. But the company proposes.'[7] In the interpretations offered by Marchand and Strasser, the consumer was similarly powerless. However, this is not because of a lack of awareness of the existence of products but because, through advertising and branding, mass marketers successfully manipulated consumers' preferences to such an extent that they purchased products for which hitherto they had had no need.[8] Strasser maintained that American consumers acknowledged (and even accepted without demur) that corporate propaganda through advertising did indeed exert a powerful influence on their behaviour.[9] None of these authors went as far in their analyses of corporate hegemony over consumers through advertising as did Ewen in his earlier study, *Captains of consciousness: advertising and the social roots of the consumer culture*. In this semi-polemical work presented in an historical context beginning with America in the 1920s, Ewen described advertising as 'a cultural apparatus aimed at defusing and neutralising industrial unrest'.[10] Less extreme than Ewen and Strasser in attributing to advertising a transforming, manipulative, and distorting role in American society, Fox's history of American advertising since the 1860s led him to conclude that advertising as an independent influence shaping American culture

[5] Definitions of a consumer society range from one where there are many consumer goods sold in the market to one in which human values have been grotesquely distorted so that commodities become more important than people or, alternatively, commodities become not ends in themselves but overvalued means for acquiring acceptable ends like love and friendship. See Fine and Leopold, *World of consumption*, chs. 3-6. In relation to the role of advertising, see Schudson, *Advertising, the uneasy persuasion*, p. 7.

[6] Baird, *Advertising progress*.

[7] Tedlow, *New and improved*, pp. 16, 375; see also Baird, *Advertising progress*, pp. 250-6, and Cohen, 'Mass in mass consumption'.

[8] Strasser, *Satisfaction guaranteed*, p. 89; Marchand, *Advertising the American dream*; see also Galbraith, *Affluent society*.

[9] Strasser, *Satisfaction guaranteed*, p. 288; Baird, *Advertising progress*, pp. 263-4.

[10] Ewen, *Captains of consciousness*, p. 12.

reached a peak during the 1920s, thereafter becoming much more a mirror to society.[11]

Similar assumptions concerning the passivity of consumers in the face of corporate advertisers are to be found underlying a different and much earlier discourse which has its roots in the economics of industrial organization, specifically in the theory of imperfect competition and explanations of monopoly and oligopoly.[12] In 1950, in his explanation of trends in industrial organization and structure in the late nineteenth-century British economy, Kaldor described how competitors in product markets which were local or regional and competitive were transformed through large-scale advertising into national companies operating in non-competitive markets of high industrial concentration. Advertising to secure brand loyalty added to the economies of scale obtained by such firms. One effect of this was to create barriers to entry and profits which were ploughed back into heavier advertising to increase further the market shares held by the dominant companies.[13] Unlike Ewen and Strasser who are the most extreme exponents of the manipulative interpretation of advertising, from a British perspective, Kaldor did not claim that a
ing led consumers to buy goods which they would not have pu
otherwise. He regarded the effect of advertising as that of habituating consumers to their purchases and to the brands which they chose to buy which introduced inertia into consumer behaviour—an analysis which makes the influences surrounding the initial purchase particularly crucial for the seller. Whereas other authors have emphasized the importance of brand loyalty which implies a psychological commitment, preference, or taste, Kaldor's interpretation of the relationship between advertising and consumer behaviour attributes less to the power of advertising to persuade and more merely to remind, though the outcome measured by consumer behaviour in many product markets might be the same. There is, however, an implicit assumption in Kaldor's analysis that advertising tends to de-sensitize consumers to considerations of price and quantity in making their purchases, that advertising lowers consumers' demand elasticity.[14]

Counter arguments have been presented against the main critiques of advertising outlined briefly above. These derive from the approaches of sociologists, economists, and anthropologists rather than from historians and depend, at best, on empirical evidence from the recent past. They argue that in established industries advertising is employed by advertisers as a hedge against uncertainty to support products which tend to be of high quality and are already popular, that advertising is directed towards those with larger disposable incomes who are already heavy users of the product.[15] To counter the power-to-persuade argument, Schudson refers

[11] Fox, *Mirror makers*, p. 212.

[12] See the commentary on the relevant concepts relating to advertising and imperfect competition introduced in the works of Chamberlain and Joan Robinson by Eklund and Saurman, *Advertising and the market process*, pp. 20-6.

[13] Kaldor, 'Advertising and economic structure'.

[14] Eklund and Saurman, *Advertising and the market process*, p. 39.

[15] Schudson, *Advertising, uneasy persuasion*, pp. 18, 42-3.

to studies which suggest that advertising does not affect aggregate sales, emphasizing its role as a competitive tool directed against market rivals.[16] His response to the notion that the history of advertising evolved from the informative during the nineteenth century to the emotive in the twentieth, was that it reflected the rhetoric of discourse among advertisers. He maintained that it had less to do with psychology and more to do with changes in the market, the number of competitors for example, which altered the economic environment in which agencies operated. The success of products depended primarily on such tangible factors as shifts in the demographic profile of consumers, in the character of clients and their incomes, and changes in the technical possibilities of the media.[17] This emphasis on the presence of other powerful material influences on consumers is a corrective against the broader claims which critics of advertising have made. So, too, is the observation that 'the influence of advertising is relative to the information environment'[18] and that the greater the information available to the consumer, the less successful any particular advertising campaign is likely to be.

Whereas no simple and consistent conclusions emerge from th
ture which has dealt with the macro socioeconomic aspects of adv
the modern microeconomic approach to the subject has presented a more coherent analysis. The notion of competition as a static or situational equilibrium model in which information is assumed to be perfect—and therefore advertising unnecessary—is rejected. Instead, competition is seen as a process in which exit and entry take place and in which advertising is an essential tool, providing information to consumers who would otherwise find searching costly in time.[19] In response to the charge that advertising is monopolistic, Stigler has emphasized that it should be viewed as a (sunk) cost of entry, one of many, which has become necessary for firms seeking to develop new products and penetrate new markets; a cost of entry that is not a barrier.[20] Advertising increases the likelihood of success of new entrants and by so doing, it is argued, it intensifies, rather than inhibits, competition because entry is a keystone of competition.[21]

Assumptions concerning the relationship between advertising and the consumer have also been revised, the rationality of the consumer described by the Chicago School contrasting with the high susceptibility to the manipulative powers of advertisers implicitly assumed by the historians of American advertising. Social critics too, from Veblen to Galbraith, have argued that individuals behave far from rationally, that a combination of acquisitiveness and aspiration to status has caused the composition of consumption to shift away from goods satisfying 'basic needs' to products,

[16] Ibid., p. 9.
[17] Ibid., pp. 59-61.
[18] Ibid., p. 91.
[19] Eklund and Saurman, *Advertising and the market process*, pp. 9-11. See also Schmalensee, *Economics of advertising*.
[20] Stigler, 'Monopoly and oligopoly', p. 27.
[21] Eklund and Saurman, *Advertising and the market process*, p. 72.

the demand for which has been artificially created through advertising.[22] This he described as a contrivance which increases consumption that otherwise would not have occurred.[23] Yet anthropologists have argued that this distinction between essential and non-essential is an oversimplification. They regard all needs as being socially constructed, relative to the culture of the groups and society to which individuals belong. They also see wants evolving historically with or without advertising.[24] This is not inconsistent, however, with the notion of the consumer who is rational insofar as s/he is assumed to make self-interested choices intended to improve the individual's economic welfare, however subjectively defined. Advertising is seen to make consumers aware of substitute products and offers an opportunity for them to be more sensitive to changes in price and quality.[25] From the standpoint of the manufacturer, at least those making 'experience goods' (those commodities the quality of which emerges only after repeated trial),[26] advertising is used to support reputation. However, as both advertising practitioners and critics of advertising are in agreement in claiming that the effectiveness of advertising is an irrational phenomenon, the rationale behind continued advertisi
be interpreted as a form of insurance to avoid the possible conse
of ceasing to advertise.[27]

The disagreements rehearsed above over the purpose, nature, and effectiveness of advertising from the standpoint of firms, entire product markets, and consumers are based almost entirely on evidence from twentieth-century America. They are, however, relevant to any analysis of advertising, not least because the volume and intensity of advertising was at its greatest at that time and in that place, and can provide a benchmark for international comparisons. They are also relevant because many of the competing theoretical analyses of advertising generalize without being time-specific. This represents a weakness in the methodology used by social scientists which has been admitted by scholars who have researched the relationships between advertising and industrial structure, and between conduct and performance in America and Britain. Schmalensee admitted the difficulty of reaching robust conclusions concerning the American experience because 'decisions may well turn on very difficult questions of fact'.[28] Sutton was similarly extremely tentative in offering conclusions concerning the same questions in the British context because of the potentially considerable importance of inherited resources and capabilities affecting outcomes, prompting his observation that therefore 'the need to come to grips with historical influences is

[22] Ibid., p. 74; Schudson, *Advertising, uneasy persuasion*, p. 74.
[23] Galbraith, *Affluent society*, pp. 124-5.
[24] Schudson, *Advertising, uneasy persuasion*, pp. 133-5.
[25] Ibid., pp. 37-9.
[26] Experience goods have been contrasted with search goods, in that the price in relation to quality and reliability can be assessed by comparing them with others which are similar, though this process takes time (and therefore cost) to search: Stigler, *Organisation of industry*, pp. 182-8.
[27] Kay, *Foundations of corporate success*, pp. 252-3.
[28] Schmalensee, 'Product differentiation'.

palpable'.[29] Such reflections on the part of leading analysts of advertising are reminders that there is a distinct possibility that advertising may have been important at different times, in different societies, in different sectors of the economy, and in different ways. This suggests that while the concepts, theories, and assumptions which permeate the theoretical literature (and, whether explicit or implicit, some of the more assertive historical studies) may pose interesting questions, the historical specificities of time and place may or may not provide vindication. It is conceivable that because of environmental differences (economic, social, and cultural) between Britain and America, the development and significance of advertising differed, especially before the convergence of commercial advertising in the two countries during the second half of the twentieth century. Whether the approaches favoured by historians of American advertising and other commentators yield a plausible interpretation of advertising in Britain in the nineteenth century is one of the questions central to the analysis which follows.

II

Explicitly conceptual approaches have not been a major feature of the literature which has dealt with the history of advertising in Britain before the First World War.[30] The first scholarly history of modern advertising was that written by Nevett whose *Advertising in Britain: a history*, published in 1982, placed advertising media and advertising agents at the centre. It is essentially a chronological account of the growth and development of modern advertising and the advertising industry since the eighteenth century. He divided this into stages, beginning with the industrial revolution between 1800 and 1855 when advertising came to be regarded as a 'commercial weapon'. The second stage was the period of 'the great expansion' between 1855 and 1914, when the removal of taxation on newspaper advertising preceded the growth of an advertising industry which was to become increasingly professionalized. The third stage (between the wars) Nevett described as 'the golden age of advertising'. In common with Fraser's survey history of the rise of mass consumption,[31] Nevett linked the growth of modern advertising to the rise of mass marketing and the technology of mass production. The theory implicit in this account asserts that advertising became necessary 'because Britain was moving into an era when concentrated mass consumption would necessitate mass production'.[32] However, this is inconsistent with the analytical basis of his interpretation of how and why advertising had developed since the industrial revolution when changes in technology and organization had, he argued, so expanded industrial capacity that during the nineteenth century, British manufacturers found themselves facing

[29] Sutton, *Sunk costs and market structure*, p. 324.
[30] An interesting exception is the partly historical treatment of advertising by Fine and Leopold, *World of consumption*, chs. 14-16.
[31] Hamish Fraser, *Coming of the mass market*, chs. 8, 9.
[32] Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, p. 15.

the problem 'of disposing of extra production'.[33] The resulting competition led to the geographical extension of markets which stimulated advertising, partly to inform potential customers about their products and partly to persuade retailers to stock them. The origins of modern advertising, therefore, Nevett saw as a result of a transition from a sellers' to a buyers' market, from a period in which consumers purchased products on offer (from product-oriented enterprises) to one in which product differentiation in a competitive market presented an inducement to producers to advertise (when in the terminology of some historians of marketing, firms became sales- and marketing-oriented). This occurred during the middle of the nineteenth century when the stamp duty on newspaper advertising was removed in 1855.[34] That reform preceded a substantial growth of advertising until the First World War.

Thus, Nevett interpreted advertising as a means of coping with a surplus resulting from the nation's enlarged industrial capacity based on the technology of the industrial revolution. Whereas such an argument may be valid for America (as in Baird's similar interpretation of developments in the late nineteenth century in that country),[35] when ap
Britain the analysis is flawed. In part, this is because the most ad
products during the mid-nineteenth century were not those which were manufactured in volume in large enterprises employing advanced technology. They included books advertised by printers (who also advertised other items and events) and products which depended on low technology or simple science involving recipes requiring blending, mixing, and processing—the approach of a cook rather than a chemist.[36]

Perception of when the period of 'modern advertising' began depend on the definition adopted. Viewed from the literary standpoint, advertising differs from simple announcement by substituting rhetoric for unadorned information and can be traced to the late seventeenth century in Britain. This coincided with the appearance of newspapers which proliferated during the eighteenth century in London and also in the provinces.[37] McKendrick compared the content and imagery of twentieth-century advertisements with those appearing on posters, trade cards, and handbills in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which suggested that little advance had been made over the past 200 years, setting aside the prodigious changes in the methods of communication.[38] Yet, well into the nineteenth century the business of advertising was conducted (principally at London coffeehouses) informally through networks involving manufacturers, freelance writers, and newspaper proprietors.[39] While elements of continuity cannot be denied, the extent to which McKendrick's evidence from London's eighteenth-century consumer society was

[33] Ibid., pp. 23, 61.
[34] Ibid., pp. 42-9.
[35] Baird, *Advertising progress*, pp. 192-5.
[36] See below, p. 635.
[37] Wicke, *Advertising fictions*, pp. 21-3.
[38] McKendrick, 'George Packwood', p. 153.
[39] Wicke, *Advertising fictions*, p. 22.

more widely duplicated elsewhere is open to question. A statistical analysis of provincial newspaper advertising in Yorkshire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suggests that Packwood's literally unbelievable advertising campaign to sell shaving accessories, which McKendrick described in detail, was not representative, at least outside London. Until the early decades of the nineteenth century, most commercial advertising was limited to a narrow range of categories and was effected mainly through trade cards and bill posting,[40] methods which inevitably restricted the scale and extent to which access to potential buyers, almost entirely retailers, could be obtained. Looney's investigation showed that until the nineteenth century, real estate, legal notices, and the print trade (which was the most important source of advertising by far), together accounted for more than half of all advertisements.[41] Advertisements for consumer goods represented less than 10 per cent of all categories.[42] Of these, the professionals, shopkeepers, and artisans, rather than manufacturers, were the most prolific advertisers between 1780 and 1810. This reflected the importance, at that time, of informing potential purchasers of the availability of goods at specific locations. For example, in 1809, Schw Co. inserted advertisements in newspapers to inform 'medical gentlemen and the public in general' that the company had established a respectable agent in each principal town throughout the kingdom, where the Soda, Rochelle, and Artificial Mineral Waters were described as 'genuine and in as great perfection' as at the London warehouse. Fixed prices and constant supply were assured. The name and address of the local agent was included in each advertisement.[43]

One trend detectable in commercial advertising by the early 1800s was a decline in the practice of using special events (for example, to announce the arrival of a shipload or consignment, an opening, enlargement, anniversary, or novelty) as the only occasion when advertising was used and a growth in the practice of advertising items for longer periods.[44] It is this development of advertising from special event to routine activity which may be interpreted as the origin of modern commercial advertising. Beginning in London during the eighteenth century, blacking manufacturers (possibly Day & Martin or Warren's) who mixed the polish sold in bottles were among the first to label and advertise; Warren's blacking was sold in this way at least from the 1780s and continued thus well into the following century.[45] A discussion of advertising in the *Quarterly Review* in 1855 also drew a distinction between the widespread short-term commercial puffery characteristic of the eighteenth and early nineteenth

[40] Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, ch. 3. Quantification of the relative importance of advertising by category of goods and services outside London is provided by Looney, 'Advertising and society', pp. 66-7, 78-9, 205.

[41] Looney, 'Advertising and society', pp. 65-8, 120-3.

[42] Ibid., pp. 78-9, 125-8, tab. 14.

[43] Simmons, *Schweppes*, p. 34.

[44] Looney, 'Advertising and society', pp. 155-6, 283.

[45] Wicke, *Advertising fictions*, p. 2; Day & Martin was established in 1770, while Warren's was trading at least from the 1780s: Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, p. 152. As a boy, Charles Dickens stuck labels on bottles at Warren's blacking factory: Wicke, *Advertising fictions*, pp. 21-2.

centuries and advertising campaigns involving substantial annual expenditures, each amounting to several thousand pounds, made by well-established manufacturers and retailers. Such firms included Moses & Sons, London makers of ready-made clothing; Nicols, another London tailor; Heal & Son, bedstead and bedding suppliers; and Holloway whose pills were promoted around the mid-nineteenth century on the largest annual budget recorded until then.[46] Also prominent among the products advertised by the mid-nineteenth century were drink, prepared or processed food, and cleaning materials, items which share the characteristic of requiring consumers to experience that which is offered in order to judge the level of satisfaction given, compared with those offered by competing suppliers. Products of this kind were sold primarily, not by descriptions of the items, but by descriptions of the effects which items might be relied upon to provide in use. The difficulty of comparing such products provided the basis for the development of persuasive rather than informative advertising, even among the more reputable manufacturers, during the second half of the century.[47]

III

In a recent imaginative attempt to interpret advertising in Britain during the nineteenth century, Richards linked its expansion from the middle of the century to the emergence of what he has called a 'commodity culture' which he described as 'the one subject of mass culture and, as such, the centrepiece of everyday life'.[48] Whereas Nevett locates the origins of modern advertising during the first half of the nineteenth century, a central thesis in Richards's analysis is that by advertising 'spectacle', the Great Exhibition of 1851 marked a crucial turning point. It heralded the initiation of a process of 'commodification', one result of which was that products acquired a potentially heightened appeal to middle-class consumers. The spectacular representation of commodities, he maintained, defined marketing as image making. As part of such a development, through the images they used to sell products, advertisers also influenced the evolution of national, class, and gender identities. Richards acknowledged that crucial elements in 'consumer culture', notably the emergence of a market society, predated the Great Exhibition by several decades; moreover, he noted that a lag of a decade intervened before advertising displayed signs of (possible) tangible effects of the Exhibition upon middle-class consumers' behaviour. Three more decades were to elapse, according to Richards, before patterns of working-class consumption were also affected when advertisers finally 'admitted' them into the consumer society. Closely focused on images, Richards's analysis is presented with little reference to changes in the technology of printing and its impact on the press, to changing levels of living standards, or

[46] *Qu. Rev.*, 97 (1855), pp. 211-12.
[47] See below, pp. 640-1.
[48] Richards, *Commodity culture*, p. 1.

to developments in industrial structure and organization. There is no consideration of the possibility that readers of the popular press were neither, as he assumes, inert and inexperienced in dealing with visual images, nor lacking in the experience of purchase and use of consumer goods[49] (often associated with credit which is another dimension missing from his analysis). Yet a growing volume of commercial advertising in London newspapers intended for working- and lower middle-class readers between the 1850s and 1880s covered an increasing range of products, more of which were directed towards working-class than towards middle-class readers. Anderson's study of the popular press in the nineteenth century points to a growing familiarity with sensation among the working classes through the 'mass' pictorial magazines which increased in numbers and popularity during the first half of the century.[50] Thus, sensational illustration offered an appropriate preparation for the imagery presented to them by advertisers.

Both Richards and Nevett employ the concept of surplus goods, the former referring to a perceived surplus, the latter to a real excess of production in the economy, neither of which carries conviction. [illegible] 'surplus' has been commented on above. The surplus to which [illegible] refers as a transforming influence on advertising is a virtual phenomenon allegedly created as a result of the impact of the Great Exhibition. His argument is that by 'spectacularising advertising' the Exhibition marked a 'pivotal moment' generating a contemporary perception that goods were available for all and 'that there was enough of everything to go round'.[51] To the Exhibition is also attributed the initiation of a process of commodification whereby products *per se* acquired a potentially heightened appeal to middle-class consumers. The spectacular representation of commodities, he argued, defined marketing as image making which, though not until the 1880s, achieved a 'monopoly of signification in the public sphere'.[52] In this interpretation, advertisers until then had not been interested in the working classes 'as the consumer economy had yet to reach them'; that, it seems, would not happen until the mid-1890s when the commodity culture began to embrace the working-class participants in the consumer society. He saw this as a development resulting, in part, from the images employed by advertisers to sell products; images which, at the same time, influenced the construction of national, imperial, class, and gender identities.[53]

A generation-long lag between supposed cause and effect throws serious doubt on the plausibility of Richards's thesis. A further weakness is the result of using images which are limited primarily to advertisements which appeared in the *London Illustrated Journal* as evidence to support the argument. This was a middle-class periodical and therefore unlikely to convey much about the relationship between advertising and working-

[49] Ibid., pp. 7-9.
[50] Anderson, *Printed image*.
[51] Richards, *Commodity culture*, p. 18.
[52] Ibid., p. 19.
[53] Ibid., p. 20.

class consumers on which Richards expressed firm views. Yet in London from the mid-century onwards, a growing volume of commercial advertising covering an increasing range of products was directed towards working- and lower middle-class readers rather than those of the upper middle class.[54]

In Richards's interpretation, the working classes did not participate in the consumer society of the nineteenth century until the final decade. They were locked out by advertisers who were preoccupied with selling to the effective consuming public, leaving the working classes as 'eavesdroppers' on the exchange of communications between advertisers and the middle classes.[55] Either because of low incomes which restricted their consumption to basic necessities, or because readers of the Victorian popular press were inexperienced in dealing with visual images, or both, there was a lack of experience of purchasing and using consumer goods through the presentation of commodities as spectacle.[56] Only in the final decade of the century was the aspiration towards social emulation encouraged and fulfilled. This process fits with Benson's view that because of the sequential or 'ameliorative' character of consumption (par among the working classes) income denies selection until a reached which renders items beyond 'basic necessities' affordable, and makes choice possible.[57] Richards's interpretation, particularly applied to the late nineteenth century, is also consistent with Perkin's analysis, though he located social emulation earlier in the century.[58]

To test the validity of these analyses, it is necessary to ask a number of questions about the relationships between incomes and expenditure, advertisers' perceptions of the market, the content of advertising, and consumer motivation. Statistics relating to the standard of living during the nineteenth century allow little scope for an increase in income among the working classes before the late nineteenth century. The rise in real wages has been estimated at an average annual growth of 1.2 per cent beginning in 1813, though not until the 1870s did real incomes rise for a substantial proportion of the population.[59] The drop in alcohol consumption which began in the 1880s[60] reinforced the shift in the pattern of working-class expenditure. This evidence is consistent with Richards's perception of a Victorian consumer society in which the working classes took little part before the closing decades of the century. There is, however, abundant evidence to show that such a view is without foundation; first by examining the goods being advertised in magazines, newspapers, through street media, and in retail shops; second, by exploring the form which advertising took and by identifying which consumers

[54] See Berridge, 'Popular journalism', esp. ch. II.
[55] Richards, *Commodity culture*, p. 7.
[56] Ibid., pp. 45-6.
[57] Benson, *Rise of consumer society*, p. 29.
[58] Perkin, *Origins*, chs. VI-VII.
[59] Crafts and Mills, 'Trends in real wages'.
[60] Dingle, 'Drink and working-class living standards', p. 621.

were the intended targets; and third, by enquiring into the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

Several factors help to explain why advertising grew and became more widespread from the early Victorian period, though aggregate statistical evidence is limited and of dubious value.[61] A declining price trend in the second quarter of the century was partly the result of higher productivity resulting from the industrial revolution, and partly the impact of falling prices of imported commodities, but it was also a consequence of increasing competition between producers in regional markets affected by improvements in transport and communications following the coming of the railways. Advertisers offered provincial entrepreneurs the possibility of a route into markets hitherto dominated by larger enterprises located in London, the greatest consumption centre in Europe, or by established producers in regional or local markets.[62] The emergence of professional advertising agents whose role initially was limited to space broking was another development which, from the 1840s, enabled manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers to secure information (albeit of doubtful reliability) from specialist mailing lists.[63] The reduction in stamp
newspaper advertising in 1833 and its removal in 1855 reduced
of advertising. Falling prices of consumer goods transformed former luxuries for the middle classes to items of popular consumption due partly to high price elasticity, notably for tea, coffee, and cocoa (which were among the earliest in this category to attract advertising).[64] The growing consumption of these coincided with the increasing influence of the temperance movement,[65] while a more widespread public concern over the quality of food and drink in an age of increasing adulteration heralded the appearance of advertisements for Fry's 'pure cocoa', and Brown and Polson's 'pure unadulterated flour'.[66] An increasing recognition of the connection between disease, health, and cleanliness was another factor which offered entrepreneurs an opportunity to differentiate their products from those of competitors through advertisements which appealed to people's concerns over health. From the 1860s, newly built artisan dwellings were fitted with water closets and space was provided for a backyard clothesline, a feature which signified that, literally, it was no longer necessary to wash dirty linen in public. Another essential of social respectability, the parlour, was also provided.[67] Finally, technical changes advanced methods of advertising. Following the showcard and the poster, from the 1860s, the enamelled sign spread across the approaches to railway stations and to vehicle exteriors of all kinds. Railways also extended regional markets nationwide, though some pro-

[61] Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, p. 71.
[62] Church, 'Ossified or dynamic?'.
[63] Hindley and Hindley, *Advertising in Victorian England*, ch. 2.
[64] Forrest, *Tea for the British*, pp. 133-5.
[65] Berridge, 'Popular journalism', pp. 234-82.
[66] Burnett, *Plenty and want*, pp. 91-5; Russell, *Commercial advertising*, p. 6; Hindley and Hindley, *Advertising in Victorian England*, ch. 2.
[67] Thompson, *Rise of respectable society*, pp. 193-4.

ducts, notably Schweppe's mineral waters, had achieved a national network long before the coming of the railways.[68] From the middle of the century, new technology made it possible to produce woodcuts which took the form of a coloured design at the expense of text, a development which heralded the appearance of advertisements potentially more powerful in appealing to sentiment and which removed illiteracy as a barrier to comprehension.[69]

To be set against these factors, conducive to the marketing of consumer goods, commercial advertising (particularly that of the sellers of patent medicines who were the chief culprits) had established a reputation for deceit and fraud which undermined credibility. One effect, at least by the 1850s, was that advertising by the print trade (printers acting as agents for a variety of other items and employing verbose hyperbole to promote them) and by vendors of patent medicines was associated in the minds of middle-class readers with fraudulent and false claims.[70] Practitioners frequently presented medications of doubtful efficacy for dubious purposes in language which combined ambiguity, innuendo, or even sensationalism, testing the credulity of the public and attracting tc
tising generally an attitude which regarded the practice as dishon
this at a time when respectability was becoming a widespread aspiration in society. Overtly 'medical' advertisements often consisted of lengthy explanations of the supposed efficacy of treatment for 'secret' and sexual diseases, 'lost manhood' or 'spermatorrhea', and supposed abortifacients. Such claims for these and other placebos continued to be a major component of advertising in the more sensational Sunday newspapers throughout the nineteenth century. They have been described as an index of the lack of respectability of the newspapers in which they appeared.[71] The imposition of fees of up to five times those charged for staple goods advertisements also represented a deterrent to advertisers of patent medicines and offers a further reason to explain why such advertisements were much less common in the pages of the more respectable press by the 1870s.[72]

At the same time, newer advertisers tackled the problem of overcoming public scepticism or hostility to their products. The method by which manufacturers (perhaps significantly, several of the leading advertisers being nonconformists) chose to distance themselves and their products from the excesses of such advertising was to adopt a minimalist approach. Their advertisements announced the products coupled with the name of the supplier and sometimes a message of no more than two or three words intended to associate name with product, such as 'Warren's Blacking', 'Price's Candles', 'Horniman's Tea', 'Reckitt's Blue', 'Glenfield's Starch', 'Colman's Mustard', 'Courtauld's Crepe', 'Bennet's Watches',

[68] Simmons, *Schweppes*, p. 34.
[69] Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, pp. 86-9.
[70] Berridge, 'Popular journalism', pp. 234-82.
[71] Ibid., p. 270.
[72] Ibid., p. 274.

'Pear's Soap'.[73] This more restrained approach to advertising by manufacturers of proprietary articles through posters which adorned omnibuses, cabs, railway furniture, and steamboats was one of the factors which assisted the gradual penetration by the advertisers of staple products into the pages of respectable newspapers and magazines.

IV

To whom did entrepreneurs direct their advertising (agents doing little more than buying space during most of the period), and did they specifically exclude appeals to working-class consumers? Research on the clothing industries by Lemire and Chapman and on the content of advertising in periodicals by Berridge suggests that modest incomes did not preclude choice.[74] From the 1840s, the production of ready-made clothing for men and boys saw the growth of one of Britain's largest industries measured by numbers employed in 1861. Waistcoats and breeches, loose-fitting garments for the working rural population.[75] and ready-made caps, shirts, and stockings made from cotton instead or silk, denoted a social deepening of the market.[76] So, too, did the production of ready-made boots and shoes which, in the transition from supplying the army and navy during the wars with France, underwent a similar process, producing non-bespoke footwear for a developing civilian market.[77] Both clothing and footwear industries, however, continued to be organized mainly on an outwork basis until the late nineteenth century. The sewing machine accelerated a previously existing trend towards standardization which had thus far developed for the purpose of marketing rather than as the outcome of technical change.

Variations in quality and choice also affected the content of advertising which was directed increasingly towards a broadening social stratum. Thus, in the 1840s, the London tailoring firm of E. Moses & Son broke with the tradition of appealing to 'gentlemen' and to others possessing substantial incomes. In popular magazines and booklets distributed free of charge, eye-catching illustrations coupled with jaunty doggerel extolled the quality of new ready-made clothes 'at prices that a mechanic can afford to pay'.[78] Likewise in 1856, 'Friend of the People' John Lewis adopted a similar policy at his small Liverpool store, introducing innovative advertising as the number of stores grew. Between 1869 and 1889, 20 million halfpenny cash books containing twice the number of pages of standard cash books were sold, each including a price list of Lewis's goods advertised on each page: cheap ready-made suits, shirts, hats, and boots for men and boys.[79] It was economy that was emphasized in the

[73] *Qu. Rev.*, 97 (1855), pp. 211-12; Church and Clark, 'Origins of competitive advantage'.
[74] Lemire, *Fashion's favourite*; Chapman, 'Innovating entrepreneurs'; Berridge, 'Popular journalism'.
[75] Godley, 'Development of the clothing industry'.
[76] Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[77] Church, 'Messrs Gotch & Sons', pp. 140-9.
[78] Chapman, 'Innovating entrepreneurs', pp. 15-18.
[79] Briggs, *Friends of the people*, pp. 30-1, 44-55.

advertisements for Johnson's dyes ('why buy a new one?'),[80] and in those for emigrant outfits (including bedding, washing and eating gear, and a chest to transport them) advertised by Jay's General Mourning Warehouse whose main line was the supply of mourning requirements 'suited to any grade and conditions of community'.[81] When Reckitt introduced the new crystal starch in 1851, the declared intention was 'to bring it within the reach of all classes' by supplying it 'at such low prices to the retailer which (sic) enables him to sell it even in small packets'.[82] A showcard issued in the same year held out the prospect of 'washing made easy by the use of Reckitt's improved washing compound which saves time, labour, and money, and the wear and tear of rubbing'.[83] The introduction of advertising packaging in order to sell items in small sizes was the route taken in 1850, through which the makers of Reckitt's starch, following the example of Horniman's tea and Colman's starches and mustard in the 1840s, sought to deepen the market.

Branding was a part of this process of establishing and maintaining reputation which enabled the manufacture to charge premium prices for the higher quality product lines. Yet branding and advertisin also important for producers competing in markets in which sut differentiation of products was difficult, in which larger competition was strong, and sales of products of cheaper lower quality were necessary to expand or sustain sales. Schweppe, Beecham, Reckitt, Cadbury, Colman, Lewis, and later Lever and Rowntree were prominent advertisers of branded 'experience' goods, though Lever appears to have been the first to separate product brand from the company's name. In relation to the issue of advertising versus competition, each of the enterprises was small at the time when advertising was first undertaken and entry into an existing trade was the motive. Colman and Reckitt established themselves as starch-manufacturers to break the monopolistic hold of the large London starch makers who were favoured by excise arrangements and who at the time of Colman's and Reckitt's entry during the 1840s, did not advertise.[84] Cadbury became heavy advertisers in the 1860s in order to break into, and later to become a major competitor, in the trade in cocoa and chocolate hitherto dominated by Fry who had been advertising since the 1830s.[85] Fitzgerald explained that Rowntree's initial failure to compete with Cadbury's Cocoa Essence was attributable to an unprogressive attitude towards product development and to the absence of advertising of Rowntree's Epp's Cocoa. A national advertising campaign introduced in 1897 was the turning point in that company's history.[86] Similarly, Lever developed a strong position for his soap-making business through advertising to compete with long-established dominance by large

[80] Loeb, *Consuming angels*, pp. 168-75.
[81] Chapman, 'Innovating entrepreneurs', pp. 5-8.
[82] Reckitt archive, Dansom Lane, Hull, R 289, Reckitt to Jackson & Asquith, 3 March 1851.
[83] Reckitt archive, R 289, Reckitt to Currie, McKinlay & Kirkwood, 27 June 1851.
[84] Church and Clark, 'Origins of competitive advantage'.
[85] Diaper, 'Fry & Sons', pp. 35-8; Fitzgerald, *Rowntree*, pp. 58-9.
[86] Fitzgerald, *Rowntree*, pp. 74, 91.

manufacturers who, in contrast to the makers of toilet soap (notably Pears) even in the 1880s were still not accustomed to advertise. They attacked him fiercely for forcing a trade 'built upon bunkum'.[87] In each case, branding was based initially on the development of distinctive, even if easily replicable if not patented, recipes, but branded goods were also part of a marketing strategy intended to persuade or put retailers under pressure to stock an individual manufacturer's products. This represented a shift away from pushing retailers directly to stock a maker's product and towards pulling consumers into retail stores to ask for branded items. The critical technical breakthrough which accelerated this development was the commercially feasible production of posters by lithography which dates from the 1870s.[88] Increasingly, advertisers dispensed with the presentation of products illustrating a message directly related to them and substituted instead an arresting picture or design unrelated to the main message. From the professional advertiser's standpoint, such an approach gave the pictorial element a separate existence to which a brand name could be attached.[89] Thus, marketing development occurred only partly through the representation of commodities; this was Richards's th
equal and increasing importance was the practice of branding through the association of company names with products which allowed firms to extend product lines (for example, by variation in package sizes, forms, colours, or flavours) supported by the reputation of the business. Increasingly important too, even outside London, advertising occurred in media which, unlike magazines and newspapers, were not class-specific. It was the increasing practice of branding between the 1840s and 1870 which led to an article appearing in *The Grocer* which urged readers 'to advertise to keep alive'.[90] During the nineteenth century, therefore, advertising appears to have been primarily a competitive weapon rather than a defensive barrier to entry.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of entrepreneurs were directing their advertising and marketing strategies towards the working as well as the middle classes. How successful were they? Tangible evidence of the consumption of goods which extended well beyond 'basic necessities' suggests that, contrary to Richards's view, neither low incomes nor a lack of experience in dealing with advertisers' images shut the working classes out of the consumer society until the end of the nineteenth century.[91]

The increase in household formation during the early Victorian decades, especially among the artisan class, gave rise to expenditure on items for display in the parlour as well as consumer durables for practical use, including leisure activity. Even in the 1840s, official reports relating to the working conditions of and communities inhabited by coalminers (who for many contemporary observers were perceived as 'a race apart' and

[87] Musson, *Crosfield & Sons*, p. 100.
[88] Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, pp. 86-7.
[89] Ibid., pp. 86-9.
[90] Hosgood, ' "Brave and daring folk"?', p. 290.
[91] Richards, *Commodity culture*, pp. 7-9.

low in the social pecking order) include descriptions of housing interiors which were clean and also 'typically showy and costly'. Often they included a mahogany chest, a four-post bed, and an eight-day clock within walls 'bedecked with a profusion of coloured prints and lithographs'.[92] Richards specifically dismissed the possibility that working-class homes might contain items other than the bare necessities, commenting that the piano 'passed them by entirely';[93] yet in 1873, the leader of the Yorkshire miners remarked on the increase among miners' families in the ownership of harmoniums, pianos, and perambulators,[94] consumer durables which were widely advertised and sold at the time. The key to ownership of these and other consumer durables such as iron and brass bedsteads, sewing machines, and machine-made watches from Switzerland and America[95] was the growing practice of hire purchase, and, for less expensive working-class 'luxuries' (ownership of which was often temporary) the widespread use of credit or the pawnbroker.[96]

Another manifestation of working-class expenditure on non-essentials during the period is the increasing proportion of household budgets spent on cleaning materials (cleanliness being next to godliness and incr popularly associated with health).[97] The budgets of families r between £55 and £150 a year, the point which conventionally has come to divide working- and middle-class income reported by Rundell in 1827, each included weekly expenditure on soap, starch, and blue for washing, and on cleaning materials which included blacking.[98] In 1844, the washing expenses of labouring families in London were roughly one-half of the amount spent on rent; for middle-class families the figure was one-third.[99] One contemporary observed that the wearing of better clothes, 'starched collars and bright boots', ensured that the working-class family was well turned out on occasions, at least on Sundays and at funerals.[100]

Expenditure which defined social position as well as meeting basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter was not a novel phenomenon, either before or after the Great Exhibition.[101] Furthermore, within the working classes the increasing number of those who regarded themselves as 'respectable' observed conventions which, at least on occasions, involved expenditure on appearance, both of the person and the home. This

[92] John Liefchild, quoted in Church, *Victorian pre-eminence*, p. 610, and quoting from *Morning Chronicle*, p. 622.

[93] Richards, *Commodity culture*, p. 8.

[94] Church, *Victorian pre-eminence*, p. 610. Estimates of the numbers of pianos in British homes also suggest that they were to be found in working- as well as middle-class homes, in particular after the introduction of the relatively cheap iron-framed oversprung upright in the 1850s: Ehrlich, *Social emulation*, pp. 7-15.

[95] Berridge, 'Popular journalism', ch. II.

[96] Ehrlich, *Social emulation*, pp. 7-15; Johnson, 'Conspicuous consumption'. See also Rappaport, ' "Husband and his wife's dresses" '.

[97] Church and Clark, 'Cleanliness next to godliness'.

[98] Rundell, *New system of practical domestic economy*, pp. 424-30.

[99] Davidson, referring to the Report by General Board of Health on the supply of water to the metropolis, 1840: *Woman's work*, p. 136.

[100] Quoted by Johnson, 'Conspicuous consumption', p. 35.

[101] For an informative general discussion of consumption, income levels, and 'basic necessities' see Glennie, 'Consumption within historical studies'; Johnson, 'Conspicuous consumption'.

similarly gave rise to expenditure on consumer durables for use and for display. An observation by Engels made in 1888 suggests that during the course of a lifetime of observing English society, working-class behaviour had altered visibly: 'The most repulsive thing here is the bourgeois respectability which has grown deep into the bones of the workers.'[102]

Whereas Engels thought that the process of *embourgeoisement* occurred during the middle of the century, Richards has placed it at the end and attributed its progress to advertisers who, ideologically motivated, mobilized their skills in manipulation against the working class[103] by depicting images of heroes, nation, and empire which were intended to impose middle-class attitudes and values.[104] This raises the question of consumer motivation and the susceptibility of consumers to advertising, issues about which some historians have expressed strong convictions. McKendrick and Perkin[105] for an earlier period and Perkin, Johnson, and Richards[106] for the nineteenth century have emphasized the emulative motive among working- and middle-class consumers. Middle-class values, acquisitive and behavioural, were either absorbed by the working classes, which was Perkin's view, or imposed on the working classes, the conclusion o including Richards, who see powerful social control exercised t images. Loeb's analysis of Victorian advertising, which focused on the implications for women of contemporary advertising images, led to a different conclusion. She stressed that their appeal was primarily to hedonistic inclinations above aspirational impulses, concluding that they 'reflected democratic aspirations that promised material gratification for even the humblest consumer'.[107] Her evidence showed that while advertisements for luxury substitutes, such as simulated diamonds, silver plate, and electroplate exploited aspirations to social emulation, these represented only a small proportion of total advertising. Moreover, advertisements for jewellery, including watches, emphasized economy, for payment plans were common features of advertisers' appeals to the public. This was the key to the transformation of watches from luxury item to affordable necessity,[108] which the introduction of machine-made watches accelerated. Costume jewellery was promoted as a novelty rather than as imitation, appealing broadly to consumers' interest in variety rather than social position reflected by the possession of items which were the subject of exclusive appeal. 'Turkish' carpets and lace curtains were advertised, emphasizing accessibility as a result of low prices secured by cutting out middlemen, while products marketed for the first time stressed a broad appeal: packaged foodstuffs and soap in small quantities, and Beecham's Pills for 'all the family'. Loeb described the advertisements of the period

[102] Quoted in Pollard, *History of labour*, pp. 122-3.
[103] Richards, *Commodity culture*, pp. 4-5, 8.
[104] For a thorough examination of such images, though reaching a different conclusion, see Loeb, *Consuming angels*.
[105] McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, eds., *Birth of consumer society*; Perkin, *Origins of modern society*.
[106] Perkin, *Origins of modern society*, pp. 85-97; Johnson, 'Conspicuous consumption'; Richards, *Commodity culture*.
[107] Loeb, *Consuming angels*, p. 199.
[108] Ibid., pp. 164-7.

for every sort of product as suggesting not only selection and availability but also the 'unfathomable vastness' of mass production; she used this emphasis to promote consumption,[109] albeit often with economy and thrift in mind. Overall, the evidence suggests that while many advertisements emphasized economy, some of the items increasingly purchased by the working classes were those which middle-class consumers also possessed. The piano is the prime example, though there is no reason to suppose that social aspiration was any more of a motivational force than the desire to possess one for entertainment value once they became affordable through instalment purchase.

V

So far, the balance of the evidence and argument presented above has led to a view of the relations between advertisers and consumers as having been essentially rational, at least until the 1880s, that advertisements supplied information rather than appealing to sentiment (patent medicines excluded as a special case); copy typically referred to quality, and price.[110] This, indeed, was the starting point of analysis of the developments in American advertising which was based on evidence from advertising practitioners, clients, and editorial copy which appeared in *Printer's Ink*, the leading American advertising journal aimed at practitioners between 1890 and 1930.[111] Curti perceived a change in the assumptions of advertisers in relation to the motivations and susceptibilities of consumers. Before 1910, the majority of advertisers viewed an advertisement as a method of informing rather than persuading the public. By 1910, a minority had begun to conceive of human behaviour as irrational.[112] Two factors were adduced to explain this. One was an increase in product differentiation as a consequence of the growth of oligopolistic competition accompanied by intensification of aggressive advertising techniques. The other was the growing influence of the social sciences, particularly psychology, which contributed to a trend towards an emphasis on the strategy of appealing to the non-rational and emotional basis of human nature. Strasser's perception of the changing characteristics of advertising in America is similar. However, she pushed back to the 1870s the shift towards emotional (and any other non-rational) appeals by advertisers. In addition to the changes in economic structure, increasing competition within the media prompted magazine publishers and newspaper proprietors to offer low rates to advertisers who were encouraged to take up large spaces. This was also the period when advertising agents extended their functions beyond that of space broking to a wider and more creative role in marketing.[113]

[109] Ibid., pp. 168-75.
[110] Ibid.
[111] This paragraph is based on Curti, 'Changing concept', pp. 335-45.
[112] Curti's analysis of this period was accepted later as a starting point for an interpretation of the period between 1890 and 1980 by Leiss et al., *Social communications*.
[113] Strasser, *Satisfaction guaranteed*, pp. 91, 113-21.

There are parallels in Britain to these developments.[114] Beginning in 1879, the advertising agency of Charles Mitchell & Co. (established in 1837) handled advertising accounts for an increasing number of American manufacturers seeking to sell packaged branded goods in Britain.[115] Simultaneously, American agencies began to open offices in Britain, among them the J. Walter Thompson agency which opened a London office in 1899.[116] However, the advertising used by American agencies within the US was the source for W. H. Lever's file of newspaper cuttings supplied to him by an agency.[117] On his visit to America in 1888, he purchased the slogan 'Why does a woman look old sooner than a man?' from a Philadelphia soapmaker, copying the American manufacturers' practice of wrapping laundry soap in a similar way to the packaging of more expensive proprietary branded toilet soaps in tablet form. When, shortly after this, Lever's 'Sunlight Self-Washer' was launched, it was the first British branded household laundry soap.[118] As one of the heaviest spenders on advertising establishing large sales in America as well as Britain, his methods drew much attention in the British advertising press which carried articles on the latest approaches to advertising in A including a series in 1902 on the subject of 'scientific' advert With a lag, therefore, American 'scientific' methods of advertising were known and some were being adopted in Britain between the 1890s and 1914, others even earlier.

The process by which associational images began to take precedence over informational content on utility, price, and quality of a product has been identified in Britain simultaneously with this development in America. From the 1880s, advertisements for soap commonly showed beautiful women in various stages of undress, often sanctioned by the use of a classical setting (a Grecian bath for example) or apparel. The Romeo and Juliet motif was another method through which the advertisers associated their product with romantic love, as in Hudson's Forget-Me-Not Soap, or Cash's Ladder Tapes. By such devices advertisers appealed to the sensual emotions, just as the juxtaposition of mother and child conjured up a vision of maternal love.[120] But there are much earlier examples of this approach. For example, in 1850, the Quaker starch maker, Isaac Reckitt, was attracted by an advertisement for Glenfield Starch by a Dublin manufacturer which featured 'a female figure in white'. While remarking that 'there is nothing intrinsically of much value in the meaning of the thing', he was impressed by the impact of 'contrast

[114] Smith, *Successful advertising*, pp. 111-13.

[115] Such accounts included Sapolio and Cuticura soaps, Angier's Emulsion, and Gillette Safety Razor: *Advertising World*, 16, 7 (1909), pp. 805-13.

[116] 'Advertising in England', *Advertising World*, 2, 9 (1902), pp. 133-41; West, 'From T-square to T-plan', pp. 199-200.

[117] Unilever archives, Port Sunlight. Lever correspondence, 182 Lever to Goss, 26 Sept. 1907.

[118] Wilson, *History of Unilever*, vol. I.

[119] W. Dill Scott, 'Psychology of advertising', *Advertising World*, 2, 9 (1902), pp. 133-41; Nevett, 'American influences'.

[120] Loeb, *Consuming angels*, pp. 60-3, 136-41.

and novelty' upon the observer.[121] Two months later, with a similar aim in mind, he and his sons resolved to use the 'Graces' to advertise Reckitt's Imperial Wheaten Starch and engaged the printers Currie, Mackay & Kirkwood, to produce the advertisements. The sample showcard which the agency devised was unacceptable to Isaac who explained: 'the Graces are not necessarily connected with our business, but we thought that if dressed in white and wreathed in lace, falling in graceful festoons about them, there would be an appositeness combined with novelty which would be attractive. Yours are simply the figures, and we think seeing they are draped, are hardly sufficiently so. At the same time, a few wreaths placed falling between the edge of their dresses and feet would rather relieve this point. What is the expense of this showcard?'[122] In 1869, a Cadbury's chocolate advertisement pointed in a similar direction, away from informative advertising, appealing to consumers through association by image; it featured a girl in a muslin frock, a red flower in her hair and a kitten on her lap.[123] The use of suggestion by association through images and symbols had its roots in British advertising long before 1890. Yet, at the same time, advertisers used different
simultaneously according to the target population for which item
the product line were intended and took account of other competitors in the market.

VI

The review of the literature on advertising in Britain in the context of theory and concepts and the historians' generalizations surveyed in section I suggest that modern advertising originated during the late seventeenth century when, to strengthen sales appeal, rhetoric was added to information in the form of announcement concerning the availability of goods. While from the start London was in the vanguard of advertising activity and techniques which tended to focus on special events, the second stage of development was a change in the character of advertising to that of a routine activity. This began in London during the mid-eighteenth century and extended to the provinces in the early 1800s. Retailers and wholesalers were the principal advertisers, though from the mid-nineteenth century an increasing number of manufacturers began to advertise, guiding their efforts first towards retailers and later directly to potential consumers.

Patterns of consumption among the less affluent population by the middle of the century (and long before) invalidate the argument that this group was excluded from the consumer society of Britain until the 1890s as well as the claim for the special transforming significance of the Great Exhibition. Working-class consumption included the purchase of items

[121] Reckitt & Colman Archives, Dansom Lane, Hull, R 289, I. Reckitt to Currie, Mackay, and Kirkward, 18 Nov. 1850.
[122] 24 Jan. 1851.
[123] Williams, *Firm of Cadbury*, p. 43.

which could not be classed as basic necessities. This also suggests that, except for those living in or close to destitution, 'discretionary income' is a dubious concept which disregards the extent to which 'needs' and 'wants' were socially constructed in a process in which socio-economic and cultural environmental influences were important. For the vast majority of products heavily advertised, the frequency with which their price or cheapness, quality, and efficiency were the dominant features of advertisements suggests that social emulation, insofar as it is possible to provide evidence of it, was only one of a variety of aspirations to which advertisers appealed. It would be misleading, therefore, to describe emulation as the single most important driving force behind consumption.

From the advertisers' standpoint, it is by no means certain that Baird's account of the emergence of modern advertising in the US is also applicable to developments in Britain. Baird emphasized the appearance of a new range of consumer durables which were manufactured through continuous process methods and which were relatively homogeneous as a result. She traced the emergence of 'modern product advertising' beginning in the 1880s to large, 'managerially operated corpo
which were the principal advertisers rather than to owner-managed firms.[124] In Britain, it is plausible to hypothesize alternative origins of the same process, though the practice of advertising at least partly in-house by manufacturers, rather than through agencies, survived longer there than in the US. Among the advertising innovators in the British consumer goods sector were small and medium-sized owner-managed firms which, by the end of the century, were large by European standards, perhaps because advertising had formed part of a systematic marketing strategy.[125] The widely acknowledged international success of British manufacturers of packaged branded goods[126] adds plausibility to such an interpretation. Those entrepreneurs who established lasting brands through advertising did so to effect an entry into competition with larger established producers. The ultimate effect in several trades by the end of the century was oligopoly, though within a context of international competition.

The idea that early advertisements were directed towards a rational consumer and that by the end of the century they appealed to non-rational impulses is an over-simplification. The need to persuade as well as to inform was acknowledged long before. Furthermore, one was not a substitute for the other. Until well into the twentieth century, some goods (laundry products for example, with which critics have long associated the excesses of modern advertising) required that the consumer was given detailed information on how to use the soap, starch, or blue in order to achieve the best results. None the less, these and products linked to personal hygiene and appearance were also the subjects of persuasive

[124] Baird, *Advertising progress*, pp. 192, 255-6.

[125] This thesis in relation to mid-nineteenth-century developments is touched on in Church and Clark, 'Origins of competitive advantage'.

[126] Chandler, *Scale and scope*, pp. 366-89.

advertising from the mid-century. This development appears to have been less the result of changing perceptions of human nature and the manipulative tactics of advertising agents and more a reflection of the intensification of competitive conditions in markets and the related drive towards product differentiation. Advertising contributed to the changing market shares obtained by new entrants, though its relative importance compared with other factors affecting quality and cost cannot be measured.

Even though advertising was created primarily for an economic purpose, economic historians, unlike those working in social and cultural history, have to enquire systematically into advertising, whether in search of uniformities (the characteristic of sociological and contemporary cultural studies of advertising) or differences, over time. The significance of types of product in explaining different approaches to advertising has been recognized in the literature on the economics of information from which originates the analytical distinction between search and experience goods.[127] An approach which looks at the advertising of specific products in relation to the modes of production and distribution as described by Fine and Leopold is consistent with this, if only because across th spectrum of commodities, characteristics differ and are likely been advertised in different ways.[128] Each of these questions deserves exploration, though for the historian the possibility that there are chronological as well as sectoral differences should be a prime consideration. Whether research in the future proceeds along horizontal or vertical lines of enquiry, to advance the understanding of the economic and social history of advertising, primary research must answer such questions as: how were levels of advertising expenditure decided? What were the relationships between local, regional, and national advertising strategies? Was advertising the weapon of the large firms in defence of market share, or was it part of a competitive marketing strategy whereby the small and medium-sized firms gained market share and grew in size? How did producers visualize consumers and what effects did this have on policy? How did other elements in the marketing process, notably the recruitment and deployment of salesmen and relations with wholesalers and retailers, contribute to commercial performance? For the era before the proliferation of professional advertising agencies in the twentieth century the archives of producers and of enterprises in the distributive sector should provide some answers.

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[127] Stigler, *Organisation of industry*, pp. 182-8; Nelson, 'Information and consumer behaviour'; *idem*, 'Consumer information and advertising'.

[128] Fine and Leopold, *World of consumption*, pp. 194-218.

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